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## Theaster Gates Presents New Body of Work in Solo Exhibition at National Gallery of Art, Washington



Installation view of *A Game of My Own*, 2017  
 Courtesy of the artist, White Cube, and Regen Projects  
 National Gallery of Art, Washington

Updated: February 16, 2017

Washington, DC—The cross-disciplinary American artist Theaster Gates (b. 1973) presents a new body of work, *The Minor Arts*, as part of the Tower exhibition series at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. On view in the East Building, Tower 3, from March 5 through September 4, 2017, ***In the Tower: Theaster Gates*** examines how discarded and ordinary objects acquire value through the stories we tell. It marks the artist's first solo exhibition in Washington and on the East Coast.

As with his larger projects, Gates created this exhibition out of his collections of "modern castoffs," a term he uses for materials that technology, the market, and history have left behind. The objects refer to the decline of urban institutions and traditions through their use of elements ranging from a high school gym floor to a demolished church's slate roof. Drawing from overlooked forms of craft and labor such as roofing and ceramics, the artist encourages the viewer to consider the artfulness of the everyday and gives new value to the minor and the outdated.

"Over the past decade Theaster Gates has created an impressive body of work that powerfully explores the relationships between art and life, past and present, ignored and valued," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are thrilled to have Gates as part of our tradition of presenting the works of leading contemporary artists in the East Building's Tower 3 gallery."

### Exhibition Organization and Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art. The exhibition is made possible by The Tower Project of the National Gallery of Art.

### Exhibition Highlights

*The Minor Arts* presents an installation of new work that integrates a diverse range of materials including tar, slate, bronze, wood, clay, and marble. The installation's largest component, *Slate Corridor for Possibility of Speaking in Tongues and Depositing Ghetto Reliquary* (2017), is a 48-foot-wide and 20-foot-high portion of a slate roof saved from the decommissioned St. Laurence Church in Chicago. By detaching the structure from its function and repositioning it at eye level, Gates brings the unseen into our view and highlights the aesthetic qualities of the roofer's skillful work.

Also included is *New Egypt Sanctuary of the Holy Word and Image* (2017), a towering freestanding library with a marble floor, also from St. Laurence Church. The work memorializes archival issues of *Ebony* magazine, which were given by the Johnson Publishing Company to Gates's Rebuild Foundation when the publisher moved its headquarters in Chicago. Rebound by a Chicago bookbinder, the seminal periodicals chronicle African American life and culture from the 1940s through the 2000s. Additional objects include *A Game of My Own* (2017), comprising floorboards from a high school gym reordered into a form evoking geometric abstraction and three tar paintings, created using a technique Gates had learned as a child from his father, a roofer by profession.

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Gates is the fourth living artist to be featured in the Gallery's ongoing In the Tower exhibition series, following Barbara Kruger, Kerry James Marshall, and Mel Bochner. Other artists in the series include Barnett Newman, Nam June Paik, Mark Rothko, and Philip Guston. The Tower 3 gallery is located in the I.M. Pei-designed East Building, reopened in 2016 following a three-year renovation. With more than 500 works in a range of mediums including photography, works on paper, media arts, painting, and sculpture, the East Building galleries now present a new narrative that tells a more expansive history of modern art.

### Curator and Related Programs

The exhibition is organized by Sarah Newman, exhibition guest curator and James Dicke Curator of Contemporary Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

### Lecture

*Conversations with Artists: Theaster Gates*

February 26 at noon

East Building Auditorium

Theaster Gates, artist, in conversation with Sarah Newman, exhibition guest curator and James Dicke Curator of Contemporary Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

### Concert

*Jason + Theaster: Looks of a Lot*

February 24 at 8:00 p.m.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Eisenhower Theater

Contemporary jazz pianist and Kennedy Center Artistic Director of Jazz, Jason Moran, teams up with Theaster Gates to remount a work that premiered at the Chicago Symphony Center in May 2014. The piece comprises a series of new blues compositions presented in correlation with art and set pieces designed by Gates. For the work's D.C. premiere, musicians from Chicago's Kenwood Academy High School join students from Washington's Duke Ellington School of the Arts on stage. Conceived by Moran, the work is a meditation that explores themes of contemporary life for youth in Chicago, where practicing the art of music becomes a tool for survival and healing. This performance will also feature saxophonist Ken Vandermark and vocalist Katie Ernst.

### Theaster Gates

Born in 1973 in Chicago, Theaster Gates received a bachelor's degree in urban planning and ceramics from Iowa State University (1996), a master's degree in fine arts and religious studies at the University of Cape Town (1998), and a master's degree in urban planning, ceramics, and religious studies from Iowa State University (2006). His practice includes sculpture, installation, performance, and urban interventions that aim to bridge the gap between art and life. Gates works as an artist, curator, urbanist, and facilitator, and his projects attempt to instigate the creation of cultural communities by acting as catalysts for social engagement that leads to political and spatial change.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Black Archive*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria; *True Value*, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy; and *How to Build a House Museum*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada (all 2016); *The Black Monastic*, Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2014); *13th Ballad*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, U.S. (2013); *The Listening Room*, Seattle Art Museum, U.S. (2011); and *To Speculate Darkly: Theaster Gates and Dave the Potter*, Milwaukee Art Museum, U.S. (2010). Current and upcoming projects include *But To Be A Poor Race*, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, U.S. through February 25, 2017 and an exhibition at White Cube Hong Kong from March 21-May 20, 2017.

His work has been included in group shows including the Whitney Biennial, New York, U.S. (2010); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012); *The Spirit of Utopia*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, England (2013); *When Stars Collide*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, U.S. (2014); *Gone Are the Days of Shelter and Martyr*, as part of *All The World's Futures*, the 56th International Art Exhibition – Venice Biennale, Italy; and *Three or Four Shades of Blue*, as part of *SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms*, 14th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (both 2015).

Gates has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the *Kurt Schwitters Prize* (2017); *Smithsonian Ingenuity Award for Social Progress* (2015); the *Artes Mundi 6 Prize* (2015); the inaugural *Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics* (2013); *United States Artists Fellowship* (2012); *Graham Foundation Architecture Award* (2012, 2009); and *Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue Award* (2008). He is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit Rebuild Foundation and professor in the department of visual arts at the University of Chicago. Gates lives and works in Chicago.

### Press Contact:

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### General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery

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Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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